

Piece Of Clay

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Piece Of Clay

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Summary

George and Sapnap are artists—the former sculpts and the latter paints—in their two-studio house. George has been working on a life-size sculpture for around a month or so, and when finally piecing him together, he comes alive. Coming from the Greek myth, Pygmalion, the sculpture he names Dream makes himself at home.

Notes

hey!! this was the first fic ive ever created, like, in a serious way and finished and planned haha. go easy on this one

Chapter 1

The clay room is dusty and dry, maybe even enough to choke someone. Several iridescent plates, and some abandoned projects, are strewn across the edges of the wall. For whatever reason, George has yet to put them back in the pug-mill to recycle. His latest project, however, is in dire need of attention.

An unmoving young man stands in the middle of the room— that is, *if* you can call him a man. George has only finished putting his limbs together a few days ago, and even then, much of his shapes are undefined. This is the refining period of the sculpting, and so far, George only has the hands and tediously fluffy hair done, along with the sword he is meant to hold, which lay on the table. He had started this project a month ago, and it will likely sell for a lot if George works hard enough. After enough pacing around, a large scraping tool finds itself in George's hands and he begins to work on the collarbone. He saves the face for later—a best for last kind of thing.

Though really, faces are just tedious. It's a love-hate relationship, much like Sappnap, his housemate, and drawing hands. Their studios used to be a single living room, but the present inhabitants renovated it into two shortly after moving into the house—one to paint in and one to sculpt in. It is more organized this way.

A few hours pass smoothing out arms and shoulders—he has to work on the chest now, and George regrets throwing away his long-gone human anatomy notes from high school, though they are probably useless now considering he took them very poorly. Sighing, he washes his hands from dry clay and takes out his phone, looking up "sculpted men." Unfortunately, what comes up are not statues of men. He sighs, figuring that he should have prepared for that in hindsight, and tries again with "sculpted *clay* men" this time.

Neither of them gave good references. Instead, he goes for "ancient greek sculptures."

Yesss. I'm gonna make this fucker so sexy.

Not long after, the door opens to reveal Sappnap leaning against the wall with a cup of coffee.

"Woah, nice abs," he teases.

"...thanks?"

"I wasn't talking about you."

George gives a short chuckle, "I know. I'm making them, though."

"I suppose so."

"Suppose' so?"

For lack of a better reply, Sappnap ignores the question, "It's, like, noon, dude. Do you want some ramen?"

George figures he needs a break from all this clay, and accepts the invitation before hanging his apron at the door. They head to their small kitchen, where water is already boiling, and sit across from each other in their dine-in.

To make small conversation, George starts, "How's your project coming along?"

Sapnap takes a moment and leans back in hopes of getting a thought, "It's going ok. I'm getting sick of the smell of oil paint, though. The other prints should be going out in a week or so."

He's also been working on his project for a month so far—it's a massive canvas: a two by three feet. It is an image of none other than a Chase bank on fire, which, to be fair, is very fun to paint. Sapnap *is* a horror artist, after all, and you should respect him for that.

After the boiler clicks off, Sapnap gets up to pour the hot water in the ramen bowls. While they wait for the noodles to soften, George takes slices of green onion and ham and snugs them in the soup. God, they should've been chefs or something. Just *look* at this masterpiece. George spaces out for a hot second until the sound of them clinking on the dining table snaps him out of it. They set back down and start eating.

"So, how is *your* project doing, you nosy little rat?" Sapnap asks.

"*Little*?' I'm average height! And weren't you the one that came into *my* studio?" George says incredulously, then lets it go, "He's doing just fine. I just need to work on his chest and everything else."

"What're you gonna call him?"

George looks up, pondering, and bringing a hand up to his chin in thought.

"I was thinking of calling him 'Dream'."

"Dream? He's the opposite of dreaming. He's supposed to be a warrior!" criticizes Sapnap.

"It's about the meaning!" George justifies, then turns the conversation over, "What's the name of *yours*?"

"Arson Chase."

George pauses, for lack of a response. That *is* a really good name, actually. What the hell. Sapnap catches his defeat, and laughs.

"That's what I thought," he rubs in.

"Okay, I get it," George unusually admits, "You're better at naming things than me."

Sapnap grins smugly and hums.

They finish their small bowls of ramen shortly, tossing the remains in the surprisingly not-overflowing trash bin and head to their respective rooms afterwards. Putting his apron back on and pacing around the statue, George ponders what to do next. "Dream," as he calls him, stands with empty hands—one lower while the other is raised higher; his body gesture suggests that he is staring at the reflection on the sword he is meant to hold. Alone, however, it seems as though he is locked in a sort of slow dance. George brings his hands to cup the statue's yet-to-be existent face, rubbing some excess clay off in an attempt to make it smoother, though he has to stand up on his toes to really inspect what he's doing.

Ugh, why'd I make him so tall?

His right hand glides over to find itself in the statue's hand that is meant to tip the sword up, and he sighs wistfully. In truth, he regrets starting such a giant project, and like many artists, he is afraid of growing a distaste for its presence in the future.

But, like a fool, George can't help clinging onto this one at the moment.

A hint of tenderness glazes over his eyes as he fumbles with the statue's fingers, pressing its knuckles softly into shape. He really should get going—his arms are getting tired from holding them up for so long. Without a second thought, he steps down from the stand and grabs his colorblind glasses from the counter, dusting them off before putting them on. He doesn't wear them too often, since they'll just get slobbered in wet clay—just when he needs to paint. One of the main reasons he sculpts is because it doesn't require much color work, but when he gets a rather decorative commission, he usually consults Sapnap about the colors. Looking back, no wonder he had so much trouble with color theory as a kid.

George walks over to the closet trying to pick out a desaturated brown as an underglaze. Then, as a shiny, high-fire glaze, he selects a jar of palladium. He gives the containers a good shake, only to find that they are both very dry chunks of their color. Sighing, he takes them to the sink and fills the water up just so that the rocks of glaze are covered before setting them down. He'll have to wait at this point for them to turn liquid, maybe even until tomorrow. Realizing this, he decides to make use of the time by continuing on Dream's structure.

He takes his glasses off, staring at them sadly before putting them in a secluded drawer. Perhaps another day would they see light, but it is not at this moment. They are too important to get ridden with clay.

His fingers lace over his pack of tools, seeing fit one that feels just right. Had it been late at night, where the lone LED on the ceiling would illuminate the room, he'd feel like he were stuck in a horror movie with a torture subject. He dreamed about it once, and now, he occasionally gets unsettled when the sun goes down and he'll have to turn on the light. Mostly, however, he just keeps on working and hopefully he'll scrap enough money to install more lights.

Ignoring his thoughts, George resumes back to the body. Of clay. Yes. That's what he meant. He takes a tool and begins carving out the soft abdomen, smoothing it out the sides frequently and whatnot. Bringing a thumb up to trace over the fake flesh, he pushes in a little to create a ripple of muscle, rubbing it over or adding in more clay if necessary, and repeats. This goes on for quite a long time, hours or so, or at least until George notices that his hands are getting increasingly sore. He takes a step back for a quick break, shaking and giving his hands a rather tight stretch in the process. He takes a few more steps back to see the project in full view, and to scope out any major mistakes.

So far, Dream seems to be fine. His bottom half just needs to be started. Currently, it is in the vague shape of two legs and a crooked knee. George figures that he'll just put a towel on him; he studied enough fabric to be able to carve one out, after all. But first, his eyes shift to the clock—it is nearly nine at night. Considering the emptiness in his stomach, George pats excess dried flakes off his hands onto his apron, hanging it afterwards, and heads to the sink. Warm water runs down his arms and takes the clay with it.

Out in the kitchen, Sapnap sits with a bowl of cereal—apple jacks, to be exact. George can't blame him, though. They taste good at any time of day, so he decides to pour himself a bowl as well.

"George, I am so sick of oil paint smell. This sweet savory cereal is saving my life. We gotta get some more soon."

"It's Saturday in two days. We can go to Stop 'N Shop then."

"Yessss."

"Why don't you just use acrylic?" George asks as he gets the milk.

"They don't blend enough," answers Sapnap, then he jokes, "Maybe you'd know if you took painting."

"Well, you don't know a thing about ceramics either."

Sapnap stops teasing after that, and George grabs a seat next to him. Only after sitting down, George realizes how tired he's gotten. His knuckles ache from overwork, and if he looks close enough, he can probably see a few red areas.

"Oh," Sapnap speaks again, "I think we need to go to Michael's again. I'm running out of white paint."

"Sapnap, you're always out of white paint."

"I mean, I can't help it!" he shrugs, "White is a very used color."

Despite not being a painter, they both know that. He probably needs some new tools, too. After their cereal session, they plop their bowls in the sink, and head upstairs to their respective beds.

Too tired to even take a shower, George throws himself on his mattress, and Sapnap probably does the same. His whole body feels cold, but he sinks down nonetheless, and let's his body breathe in deeply.

That is, until he's groggily woken up by a very panicked Sapnap tugging at his arm.

"Dude, George," he hisses out of despair, "I heard noises downstairs. I don't know what the hell is going on."

George gives him a tired and deadpan look, "You sure it's not the house or something?"

"I dunno, man. It looks suspicious. I think someone snuck in," Sapnap's breaths are ragged, and George figures that he should at least go downstairs with him to calm his nerves.

"What? Snuck in? We haven't left the house in a month," he still protests.

"Do you think someone's gonna use the door to do a break and enter?"

George stays silent for a bit, then finally gives in.

"Ok. Let's go check it out."

The house is eerily quiet at night—it's cold in the way it has a slight blue tinge from the lack of light, but it is still physically cold, too. And actually, George is also getting increasingly frightened. It goes to show when he flinches at a creak of wood.

No one seems to be in the kitchen, no matter how dark it is. Next, they move to their studios. Sapnap's is first, but even then, it remains still in a silence that can ring your ears. They slowly sneak to the clay lab; its familiar smell washing in over George, along with some particles of dust. However, he decides to hold his breath this time.

A figure stands there, ominous, and in the middle of.. Inspecting something? At this, George's heartrate fires up, and he quickly grabs a sharp clay tool by the side, pointing it towards the figure with a grip hard enough it might make him insane. Sapnap flickers the light on, and there stands Dream, in the same position as George had left him. They both loosen, but Sapnap, in turn, incredulously stares at the statue.

"What? I swear I heard something. Or someone!" He tries to justify.

And almost immediately, a shuddering *click* sounds from somewhere, and they both jump.

George tries to calm down, reasoning, "I think that's just the kiln. Damn, that actually scared me for a hot minute."

"I don't remember the kiln making that sound."

"Yeah... that is strange. I didn't even turn it on today. But wow, thanks for waking me up."

"What?! You even thought your own piece of clay was a person—you can't judge *me*!"

"Well, that's because I'm amazing."

They fall to a silence at their stress.

Then Sapnap accepts his moral defeat, "Alright, ok, I'm sorry for wakin' you up. Let's go to sleep and forget this ever happened."

George only gives a nod, and they creak up the stairs, a little defeated for some reason. Feeling his head hit the pillow, his brain shuts off.

Chapter 2

George cracks open his eyes to his alarm blaring next to his ear. A limp hand drags over to his phone to swipe it off. It is eight in the morning, no different than any other day. Strangely, today, it does not bother him as much as he would expect it to, especially after what happened last night. He lazily pulls the covers off of him, slightly kicking them off for how tangled they are. Giving his body a rather tight stretch, he climbs out of bed and heads to the bathroom. There is a lot of work to do with what little a body he has left.

On his way, he greets Sapnap, who is still lying in bed, awake and on his phone, but not getting up.

"Morning," George says.

Sapnap makes a tired sound, though not annoyed, but he figures he should probably get up, too. Meanwhile, George brushes his teeth and fumbles with his hair for a bit, momentarily forgetting that he should be busier than this. He leads himself downstairs, creaking on the wood, and to the kitchen, where he makes a satisfactory breakfast of butter on toast—and one for Sapnap as well. A few minutes later, tired feet can be heard clambering their way to the kitchen.

"Here," George passes Sapnap the bread on a napkin, "It's not the best, but you can't paint on an empty stomach."

Sapnap only nods for a thank you, and takes a bite. With their bread, they go down to their respective studios. George enters the clay lab without holding his breath this time, though coughing dryly on floating particles once in a while. He pulls his glasses to his eyes, looking for the bottles of glaze he had yesterday. They should be on the middle table, but alas, it seems as though they had disappeared.

Not only that, but the statue is not quite as he remembers. Dream stands in the middle of the room, now with a sword—a glazed and fired one at that.

Did I sleepwalk or something? George asks himself, pacing around the faceless structure. No... Yes? Sleepwalkers don't remember, do they?

George makes an attempt to gently remove the sword from Dream's hands, only to be interrupted by Dream's head turning to face him more sharply than he prefers, which is to not turn at all.

His breath immediately stops out of shock, and he backs away. The figure, also in shock, points the sword towards George's neck. At this, George's lungs almost rip apart at his ear-piercing shriek.

"SAPNAP OH MY GOD I NEED YOUR HELP PLEASE."

Shortly, the person thereof nearly breaks the door as he enters.

"Ok! I'm here." He huffs, then his eyes widen, "OH MY GOD."

The statue named Dream slowly crackles his head towards Sapnap in confusion, and, despite not wearing a face, his ominous presence is felt everywhere, gripping its cold hands on their legs to lock them in place.

Seeing that he's become distracted by Sapnap's entrance, George snatches the sword out of his hands and places it hurriedly, yet gently, on the counter behind him. Dream, surprised by the lack of a weapon, tries to bend over and sneak it back into his possession.

Yet, before he can even begin, Sapnap is already on him, and knocks off Dream's left hand from his wrist. George and Sapnap start screaming.

"Sapnap I worked so hard on that hand!!"

"I am literally trying to save your life, you idiot."

They all freeze for a hot moment, Dream backing away, seemingly in surrender, with arms up. George, hand still on the hilt of the sword, drags its creaking body across the counter, and points it at the statue.

"George, is this some kind of prank for what I did to you last night?"

"What? No..? I don't know what this thing is??"

They look at Dream, only to see him shaking his shoulders, as if he were laughing. Is he?

"Wh-what's so funny?" George stutters.

Dream motions his fingers, "Paper," he says in sign language.

They stare at him, almost daring him to make a move, as George goes into a drawer for a half-full sketchbook. Dream pulls the pen out of the spine, and begins to write. His chicken scratch is almost entirely unintelligible, though, but they manage to make it out.

Thanks for taking my hand. I'm sure this is easier if I can just have it back for a hot minute.

Begrudgingly, George picks up what remains of his clay hand, which is now a little lop-sided, and scores it back on his wrist, albeit poorly. Dream rubs it, gaining the feeling back and stretches his fingers out.

"Thank you," he signs calmly, "Now, I don't know what you expected when you interrupted me and took my sword."

"Your sword? I made that!"

"Well... you didn't glaze it. Or fire it. So I guess we take half the credit," Dream seems smug.

"What?? I'm sure sculpting it is much more than half the credi—"

"Ok, ok. Hold on," Sapnap interrupts, "First off, what are you?"

"Me?" Dream points his hand to his bare chest, "I'm Clay."

George and Sapnap stare at him in silence. Clearly, this is not a very satisfactory answer, so he continues, since, yeah: he is clay.

"Well, since you," Dream motions at George, "gave me the name 'Dream' I think I'll go by that, too. I don't know what you were on when you named me, but it kinda sounds nice."

Sapnap snickers at this, but George gives him an annoyed look, and let Dream—Clay?—continue.

"I guess I've come alive through some sort of magic. Fairy tales and whatever. Me, in particular, I'm a Greek myth. Don't know how, though, but it looks like you'll have to keep me around."

"What? No. There's gotta be a way to reverse," Sapnap loses his words, "whatever this is."

Dream tilts his body in the way that a person would ponder, like a pretentious Greek philosopher, "Maybe. Maybe not. Can't remember when I woke up, honestly, but what're you gonna do about it?"

"Can't we just take you apart?" Sapnap asks.

"In that case, I'll just do that myself," Dream's hand snaps to a wire tool, making the table shake, and brings it to his hair—

"—WAIT, NO," George interrupts him before Dream can slice a centimeter off, and practically begs, "I worked too hard on you for that. Please, don't hurt yourself."

"Wh—George?? Are you crazy?? He's not gonna sell if he's living." Sapnap argues.

George, however, pauses for a bit in guilt, "...I mean.. I've kinda grown attached to this one. And even if he can't be sold, I still put a lot of time in that hair. Maybe.. There's another way?"

Sapnap gives an incredulous look, completely stupefied, but George, in turn, gives him puppy eyes.

"Okay, I see. You are crazy," confirms Sapnap, "What do you have in mind?"

"Don't you need a lab assistant?"

Sapnap hums in thought, and gives a hint of an impressed face.

"Maybe."

It's true. They are both giant messes when it comes to their studios—sketchbooks lie everywhere, along with paintbrushes and other types of tools. Even looking at it would send someone into an unsettled, "Damn, bitch, you live like this?" Not even joking. The rest of the house is decent, though.

"So you're keeping me like a maid?" Dream signs, "I'm not even getting paid! This is slave labor!"

"You'd be doing the same thing even if you were human—working to live," Sapnap points out, "Wage slavery is no different."

Dream pauses for a second and gives it a thought—he is right. They live in a very capitalist country. Besides, he has nothing to do otherwise.

"Fine," Dream gives in.

They all stand in silence for an uncomfortable amount of time until Sapnap gets up for his own project. But before he leaves completely, he pauses at the door.

"Wait.. George, come to my studio for a sec. And... Dream..? You stay here, I guess."

George gains feeling back into his legs, and shuts the door behind him before he walks out. Despite Dream not wearing a face, both George and Sapnap can feel his stare after them.

"Are we hallucinating or something?? Is this a fever dream? Did we eat weed brownies and forget??"

And George can understand his panic, but even he doesn't have a direct answer.

"What? We don't even know how to bake weed brownies. As for everything else, though. I don't

know what to tell you, but if we're living in a fantasy, I'll accept it as much as I can," he gives an unsure look and shrugs, "I mean, this might as well happen. Life is already so weird."

Sapnap lets out an exasperated sigh, "You're impossible, and maybe you even wished this happened, but I'll deal with it."

Not convinced, George gives more leverage, "Ah.. besides, you don't know when you'll need a reference pose."

Sapnap pauses, for lack of a better response, or any response at all, because he is right. It's hard to get references anywhere.

Then, he stutters and veers from the topic, "Well, then, uh. I guess I was right about there being something in the house," as a way to get back at George.

George, in turn, considers his argument. He guesses, yeah; it is his fault they woke up that night. Only, George lets out a mere "oops"—perhaps an understatement to their situation. Sapnap gives him an annoyed, but amused look, and turns towards his studio, leaving George to stand there before returning back to his as well.

"Welcome back. Did you get over your lover's quarrel?" Dream greets him, "Am I a homewrecker?"

His shoulders shake as if he's chuckling, and George blushes. Dream continues on, unwilling to live it down.

"So, you say you've gotten attached to me," he signs, "I couldn't blame you."

If he had a voice, it'd sound so smug, and George hates it.

"Shut up. I don't remember making you this annoying."

Dream throws his hands up, "Woahh, so scary!!" He mocks.

George huffs while sitting down, a little too tired to respond verbally. He gently extends a hand.

"Gimme your hand. That'll at least shut you up."

Dream, taken aback by the gesture, reaches out his right hand.

"Not to shake, idiot. Your left hand. To fix."

"I mean, I was gonna hold it anyway, but sure," Dream signs before putting his left hand forward.

George really hopes Dream doesn't see the slight hesitation he has before taking it.

The wrist doesn't mesh cleanly into the rest of the hand, but overall he doesn't say it looks bad. If anything, Dream did a decent job trying to put it back into shape, albeit it is indeed a little crooked and lopsided, likely from the impact on the floor. George gets a hold of a detailing tool at his side, and begins separating the pinky finger from the ring finger. Next, he takes a loop tool and scrapes excess flesh from the knuckle, carving in any prints and lines with his nail.

This trails on for an uncomfortable silence. He feels sorry for every nail technician ever.

Suddenly, Dream reaches over with his right hand to grab a sketchbook, balancing a pen on it. George observes him in confusion, but finally understands what he's doing. After a short bit, the

sketchbook is turned towards him.

Thanks for the manicure.

"You're welcome, I guess," George lets out an amused breath.

Then there's a brief pause before he speaks again.

"... hey, Dream. You knew how to use that wire tool. Or at least, you looked like you did. Why is that?"

He hears a few scribbles before the response presents itself.

It's not like you haven't been working with them for the past 7 years.

Ignoring his sarcasm, George responds, "What? How do you know that?"

Lucky guess.

"No, really, how do you know that?"

No, it was a lucky guess, like actually.

"Oh. But you've seen me use a wire tool?"

I guess I have some memories of when I was in the pre-moving stage.

Damn. That's embarrassing. That is so disrespectful, in fact, but George doesn't admit it, because he is too prideful for that.

Finally, he finishes smoothing over Dream's hand with a scraper and releases it. In turn, Dream pulls his hand back to observe—it feels snug.

He turns back to George, "Thanks for the fix, doc," and puts his hand on his forehead, fingers in the shape of an "L".

George only scoffs.

"Ugh, you're so annoying."

Chapter 3

A few weeks pass. A clunking sound echoes through the house. Sapnap and George freeze their activities in the kitchen, whatever they were.

"I'm not taking a step from this spot," Sapnap affirms, "Go see your clay boyfriend or something."

"Wh—no, stop that," George stutters, "I'm sure it's just the sink."

"You weren't right the last time."

George huffs and turns to leave for the clay studio.

"Make sure you have socks on," Sapnap teases.

"Shut up."

The door is cracked ajar just so that George can peek in. The room is pretty decent. A lonely man stands next to a sink—that is, if you can call him a man. Grey knicks and cuts litter his surface, and his hands have become some sort of sludge. George slinks in silently, trying to observe without distracting too much. Behind Dream is a flat slab—well, almost flat. It seems to be in the vague shape of a poorly made face. Dream, feeling a presence in the room, turns around and pauses awkwardly. He pulls his hands out of the sink, revealing a few fingers missing, and guiltily, he shrugs.

"You're impossible," George responds, a little in shock.

He ties on his apron before going to the corner of the room to pick out a fresh log of clay, and slices a layer off. You know, like ham. Dividing it into little pieces, he fingers through his tools for a scoring utensil.

"Mind if you get me some slip?" He says.

Without a word, because, quite frankly he can't make any, Dream opens a small bucket and scoops the liquid up in a yogurt cup.

"Thank you," George says, just as he takes it from Dream's mutilated hand, "God, what were you thinking?"

Dream only shrugs again, and George sighs as he presses the knuckles into their shapes. Finally, he holds out a hand, and Dream reciprocates. Gentle knicks are sliced into what remains of Dream's missing fingers, along with a bit of slip to glue them together and a loop tool finds itself smoothing them comfortably. While doing the same with the other missing fingers, George realizes how close he is, and finds himself distracted by Dream's form, occasionally looking up at his nonexistent, flat face. It appears that Dream is focused on another part of the room, probably at the ceramic shelf or something, but regardless, the light hits him just right— fitting to be in a museum.

Oh my God. Why did I make him sexy.

"Here," he drops the hand finally, "Quit hurting yourself, or at least wait for them to dry before doing anything."

Dream gives him an apologetic tilt of the head, "My bad."

While George is here, he figures he should finish up some pottery commissions. He goes to grab a slice of fresh clay from below the pugmill, but the left over slab on the table catches his eye first.

"What were you making?"

"A face."

"What for?"

"Just thought it'd be fun."

George lets out a huff of amusement, "It looks like a two year old made it."

"And I'm a month old!" Dream pauses, "Well, maybe it's like a few weeks. But still! I'm a prodigy. I even glazed the sword for you."

George can't argue with the sword part, though the rest of his sentiment is still funny. He pats the slice of clay he's holding into a ball and plops it down on the pottery wheel's center. Sliding over a bucket of slip, he clicks the wheel on and wets his hands. Firmly holding the clay in place, the wheel slowly starts to turn as he gently presses his foot on the pedal. Meanwhile, Dream organizes the ceramics on the shelves, maybe even staring at them despite having no eyes—just out of curiosity.

"You better not break them," George side-eyes.

Dream places them back, "I know, I know."

In distaction, George realizes his pottery has gone lopsided, and lets out a sigh of annoyance.

"Hey, could you pass me a rib tool?"

The next second, a flat wooden semi-circle is thrown at him, and George, nearly getting hit in the face, fumbles while catching it.

"Hey, that's rude!" He scrunches his face at Dream.

Only, Dream responds, "Well, you caught it, didn't you?"

"You can't just throw stuff? What's wrong with you?"

Dream's shoulders shake as if he's chuckling.

George, however, decides to ignore it, and resumes back to his project. He flattens the lopsided chunk of clay back to the main piece, and tries to meld it in together. Spinning the wheel again, he returns the clay's density to equilibrium. When all the air bubbles are removed, he pokes a hole in the middle with his fingers and the solid cylinder gradually transforms into somewhat of a cup.

Suddenly, a shadow looms on the floor around him. Confused, George turns around to see Dream standing over him. A tilt to Dream's head confuses him even more.

"What?" George deadpans.

"Need anything else?"

A pause before George can answer, "...not really?"

"Kay. I'll just keep watching whatever this is, then."

"What? No. That's embarrassing, I'm not gonna let you watch me make stuff."

"It's my only form of entertainment! Besides annoying you, I mean."

"I think they can be classified as the same thing."

Dream's body language indicates that he's probably giving puppy eyes or something, but George can only scoff.

"Ok, ok," Dream begins, "How about this—you teach me how to use the pottery wheel?"

"... why would I do that?"

Dream shrugs, as he always does, "Just 'cause."

George is at a loss, but, like a fool, he decides to comply for his own amusement. The wheel slows to a soft stop as George grabs a wire tool to take the clay cup off. It needed some time to dry before modelling in detail, anyways.

"Ok," George finally replies, "Let's give it a try."

That is, until he realizes there is only one wheel.

"We're going to have to share, okay?"

Dream nods, surprisingly compliant.

However, a clash of metal rings in George's ear as he turns to see him grab a detailing tool, and terrifyingly rip a line across his flat face, along with poking two dots at smiley face-resembling distance, perhaps for a comedic effect. Not moving in shock, George can only blink.

"What... what are you doing!?"

After a small pause, Dream drops the tool back on the counter, or wherever he found it, honestly, and emits a rather deep sound, almost croaky, as if it's his first time talking. Which it is.

"Your mom," he manages to rasp out with an unmoving mouth.

"What???"

"Oh, just testing. I didn't know that would actually work."

"Why'd you do that??"

"My hands are gonna be busy while we're on the wheel. I can't talk to you like that."

There are no thoughts in George's head to make up for the brief stretch of quiet. This is going to be quite the adventure. But with a huff, he just goes along with it.

"What? You want me to take it off?" Dream exclaims, feigning hurt.

"No, keep it. It looks dumb."

Dream chuckles at this—his voice is... surprisingly rich. Perhaps it is some magical soil that granted it to him, but George doesn't delve into fantastical technicalities any further. He already has

enough to worry about. He doesn't even know why he decided to agree to this—yeah, it was for amusement, but now he's not sure. What's wrong with him, like, actually?

Ignoring his own questions, George's mind resumes back to the wheel. He pulls an extra stool over while Dream grabs another ball of clay.

"Hehe, it's a mini me," he chuckles.

"Mini you is a blob?"

"Yeah. Maybe you can sculpt another one of me."

"There's no way I'll do that."

Dream laughs at that, "That's ok, I get it. One of me is already too sexy for you to handle."

George raises a fist in an attempt to punch him, embarrassed, but then remembers he's made of clay. Instead, he merely bounces his knuckles to Dream's shoulder.

"What?" Dream goes, "I'm just complimenting your work!"

"I'm seriously going to carve you up."

"You sound like a torture artist."

"Shut it."

The rest of the day goes on with George trying to work the clay while Dream fails to keep it in place. And then trying over and over again until they get tired, if Dream can get tired, that is. It's harder than you think.

Frequently, George catches himself staring blankly at Dream's gray hands—a little dry, a little cracked, but tough. His flickering eyes trail up his arm, hovering over his collarbones and up his neck, with strong curves connecting his jaw. Something else catches his attention though, and it's the faint flow of veins up Dream's "skin."

Did I do that?

He doesn't remember making his hands so square either, but it looks nice to the bone, especially the way the divots and sharp angles in it complement the tendons lining his knuckles up. He doesn't mean to keep staring either, but Dream unlocks him from his trance with a tiny nudge anyways.

"Admiring me, are you? That's a little vain," Dream sounds smug.

Not bothering with a response, George gives him a deadpan look.

"Oh, oops," Dream continues, "I think my hand's messed up from the water."

It is. Both of them are, but just a little bit.

"This is getting a little routine, now, huh?" George wipes down his hand before offering to hold Dream's, "I should teach you to fix your own hands instead."

Dream pauses before holding his own sludgy hand out.

"Yeah," he only says.

They sit at the middle table while George works at Dream's messy phalanges. Using a soft thumb, George wipes away the sludge and knicks in faint details of fingernails. Despite him being usually standoffish, he is surprisingly gentle when it comes to clay, and Dream takes notice of this very frequently although he doesn't show it. A ghostly, but warm and tickly, feeling drags over his hand's surface, pressing in little prints and lines. If Dream had a body, he'd surely hold his breath, but the thought of George lining in cartoon-y blushes on his cheeks makes him chuckle.

"What?" George looks up from concentration.

"Nothing," Dream shakes his head.

At the last detail, George sets his tools down and carefully brings it closer to his face in inspection to confirm any finalities.

"What do you need to be so detailed for—I'm gonna mess it up eventually," Dream asks, then jokes, "You gonna kiss it or something?"

George merely scoffs at this, though his voice wavers, "No— I don't like working with clay that much."

"Aww, but do you like working with me?" Dream continues, tilting his head in curiosity.

To his surprise, George smiles, feeling a little fond, and says, "You're pretty decent."

The door creaks open with Sapnap entering.

"Hey, I got some boba—," he starts, then smirks after a face of surprise, "Woah, sorry. Am I interrupting something?"

"Yeah, get out; what's wrong with you?" Dream says jokingly.

"What? You can talk now??"

"What's it look like?"

"Like George is cheating on me," Sapnap feigns distress.

Dream turns to George, "Yeah, George, why would you do that?"

George only huffs, "You guys are ridiculous."

"Anyways," Sapnap resumes, setting a cup on the table, "I made some boba. We had some leftover powder for it."

"Ah, thanks."

"None for me?" Dream pleads like a dog.

The two humans only look at him and laugh.

"What?? You guys are so mean," he keeps whining.

Sapnap laughs, "Yeah. We are."

A bit of silence stretches between them before Sapnap turns to leave, "Alright, I'll be painting. Don't forget to wear socks."

And George nearly throws a clay tool at him.

Chapter 4

George is in the studio again, no different from any other day, working the small mug.

Or at least, he's trying to.

For however many times, because he, quite frankly, can't count them for his life, George once again catches his gaze wandering over at Dream's figure. Sure, he made him, but it almost seems now that he didn't. The way his arms stretch or his fingers curl or his stomach cracks like stretch marks—

Fuck. This is so embarrassing. What is wrong with me?

"Hey, do you think you can make me some clothes?" Dream says suddenly.

His thoughts interrupted, he pauses, and then goes, "What for?"

"I mean, it feels kinda awkward standing around here in a clay towel. Or whatever this is supposed to be," Dream answers, "...and.. I mean, not to be vain, but I'm just so sexy. You can't keep your eyes off me, can you? Well, I guess that's props to you."

George doesn't know how to respond to that, so the statement is left neither denied nor confirmed, much to his chagrin. Regardless, he guesses it'll benefit him.

"Ok, fine," he sighs, "lie on the table. What do you want? I'm not a fashion designer."

Dream hums, bringing his hand to his chin in thought, "A hoodie would be nice. Maybe some jeans."

George is almost impressed by how simple it is. The fabric folds will be a pain, though. And so it concludes: Two men are present in the clay studio, one standing, and one lying on a table—that is, *if* you can call the latter a man. A large scraping tool presses onto Dream's chest, firmly smoothing it away and dragged into different directions per the creases of the hoodie. He tenses a little, though, and George takes notice.

"Sorry," George says.

"No, 's fine," Dream just replies, "Feels weird when it's not my hands."

A few hours of quiet keeps them calm, a surprise to George. Dream nearly never shuts up, but this time, it's probably because he wants an outfit as nice as his body. At this point, the rims of the hoodie are prepped and prim. George internally grimaces, as contradictory as it is, because it was a really nice chest.

Now, to do the jeans.

George takes a deep breath, sweating a little from concentration. A metal spatula makes a sharp, satisfying sound before it slices the clay towel away, making Dream's bottom half resemble more like a human's. Taking a ribbed tool, George grazes its teeth over the top of Dream's legs, and if Dream had a breath, it would've hitched.

He wonders what it would feel if George worked on his face.

Like the hoodie, delicate knicks are detailed into the stitches, all the way down to the hem.

"You want shoes or something?" George asks from the other end of the table.

Dream tilts his head in thought, then decides, "Nah, keep em' bare."

"I knew you'd say that."

And Dream can only chuckle in response, "Hey, I'm just making it easier for you."

"Fair. Get up, I'm doing your hood."

A possibly sore Dream stretches up as if he's a human cracking his own bones. What a show off. Hours and hours of observing back muscles are wasted because of this, but George guesses working with Dream is the ultimate and intimate payoff that his shallow self refuses to admit. In fact, his dilemma is way too late to decide on anything—whether or not he truly wanted *and* whether or not he likes to keep making Dream's clothes or keep his skin visible is a mystery to him now—and he's left to deal with the consequences of his simmering desire.

He purses his lips, though he doesn't know if it's from nervousness or concentration, and slides a gentle palm over Dream's shoulder. Scoring the back of his neck with a fork, George attaches a chunk of clay to it with some slip to hold it together. Dream, in turn, shivers at the feeling, though George can't tell if it's from the cold or the wet. Regardless, the only response George can give is a light chuckle.

For a few minutes, they hold still like that. George is tempted to "ruffle" the clay hair out of endearment, but he lets his hand fall to Dream's neck and rubs the hood to the rest of the clothing.

"Hey.. after this, mind making me a face?" Dream asks.

"What? I think I've done enough things."

A pause, then, like a fool, George reconsiders, "Maybe."

He doesn't know if it's a lie or not. Neither of them do.

Eventually, George finishes up the hood, and now onto the backside of the jeans—the part he dreaded most. Dream dangles his legs off the table, swinging them like a toddler.

"Quit moving, I'm still working on those."

"Oh. Oops."

He sits further back onto the table, and with an unintentionally sultry hand, George lifts his leg and props it on his shoulder, his heart annoying him with its prominent beating, along with the crushing awareness of a demanding blush. Despite the overwhelming distraction, he tries his best to concentrate on lacing the folds together, but alas, his hands are wavering just a little bit, and so does his eyesight. In fact, the room has gotten rather dim. He takes a peek at the clock out of the corner of his eye.

7:00 PM

An interruption from his disorientation, a cold hand is felt on his cheek, and it slides down his chin in a suspiciously tender manner. He can't resist it, so he lifts his head up, and there he is at Dream's mercy, agitated in a clear infatuation. Hating it and also liking it at the same time, he doesn't know what to do.

"You're so bad at this," Dream says.

Flustered, George scrunches his face and looks away, "Shut up. I know that."

They both know they're not talking about clay here, but he removes his head from Dream's gentle hold as if he were offended, and for a hot second, he almost wants to put it back, but throws the thought from his head before he gets even more embarrassed.

"I can continue the rest on my own, if I can," Dream says softly, "Go get some rest."

George blinks in confusion, then says, "You're being strangely nice. What's gotten into you?"

"Nothing!—What? You want me to be rude?" jokes Dream.

"I... I don't know! I don't know what I want!"

And there it is—his vulnerability out in the open, *if* you could call that vulnerability.

"Sounds like you should eat something," Dream suggests.

"Probably."

George hates to admit he's right—He hates admitting *anything*. To save himself, he listens to Dream's consideration and reaches for the door.

"Oh, and George?" Dream interrupts him before he steps out.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks for the clothes."

"....No problem?"

He doesn't know what else to say, and turns to find Sapnap.

Through the small crack left at the exit, Dream's supposed gaze follows after him, feeling somewhat alone.

"Nick, you're going to hate me. You're going to hate me *so* much."

"Woah, using my real name? This is gonna be good."

George sighs. They sit in Sapnap's room— Sapnap on his computer and George on the bed. A second passes.

"Why did I make this statue sexy. This one *had* to be the one to come alive."

Not surprisingly, Sapnap bursts into an unscriptable laugh, and George gets heated.

"You shut up right now."

"*George*—Oh my *God*—George," Sapnap struggles through his breath.

At this point, George can only laugh, too, at himself, because really, what the hell is going on. He takes this moment to think: Dream is excruciatingly annoying, and yet he finds it almost funny and

cute. And he hates himself so much for it.

"Awww, George," Sapnap manages through laughing, "You're such a tsundere."

"Never use that word on me again. You are so...cringe," George quickly retorts, gritting a daring smile through his teeth. Sapnap doesn't even watch anime.

Sapnap manages to calm his fit and settles to an amused expression, "I can respect it, though."

"Uh-huh," George hums sarcastically, "*Sure*."

"Listen, listen. George. I honestly don't know what to tell you."

"I don't know what to tell you either! He doesn't even have a face! What am I meant to do with this! I can't believe myself."

George stretches his arms and falls back on Sapnap's bed, exasperated. It feels like some kind of cruel young adult high school indie movie. Like, what even *is* that.

Then Sapnap offers a little more, "I mean... I don't think..."

"You don't think... what?"

"That's it. I don't think."

"You're such an asshole."

"Ok, fine, fine. I'll be serious—I admit he's pretty chill. What're you gonna do about sending anything to the gallery, though?"

"I'll just give them the sword or something. Maybe make a stand for it—it'll sell for a lot less but it's still a lot."

"You mean Dream is a luxury few can afford?"

"Stop that."

"Hehe, whatever. In all honesty, though, he flirts with you a lot."

"....yeah...?"

"Yeah."

"...so?"

"Oh my God, George. You know what I mean."

George lets a small blanket of quiet rest between them in thought.

"Yeah, I do know. Okay, well, maybe I don't, but I'll try to do something."

This is a lie, of course. He'll just wait for something to happen instead of doing something himself—he just won't say it, though.

Sapnap replies, "Good luck, then."

"Thanks? I'm gonna.. make some fried rice or something."

And like that, he swings himself off the bed and heads for the kitchen.

Dream is still laying on the middle table, thoughts whirring. His hands ghost over his chest, expecting intonations of ribs and muscle, but his nerves, if he has any, receive the soft greeting of fabric. Had he worn a face, a hint of some profundity could be found washed over his eyes, though he wouldn't know why.

Half his weird flirting is all for quick jabs and jokes at George's ego, but what is the other half, if not genuine? Maybe he knows. Maybe he doesn't. If he got a nickel for every time he got nervous when George touched his hands, he'd have 15 cents, which isn't a lot, but it damn sure is something.

For the most part, he is glad he doesn't have a face. Or at least, not a human face, though he contemplates that for a bit.

Am I, though?

He drops his hand to his thigh, rubbing lightly at the creases at the back of his knee. The work is crisp and clean, but really, he's mostly focused on what had happened earlier that day.

Ugh, why'd I do that.

The thought is more of a self-deprecating statement than a question, but in truth, he doesn't know how to tell them apart anyways. If this is what humans call love, then he has no ground to stand on—he's completely floored.

What am I in? A shoujo anime? You can't be serious.

Dream is not one to lose his cool. Usually, he is the one that makes other people do that. And, like George, he just hates to confess his uncertainty out loud, much less show it, so he'll think to himself at a later time to burn it all out.

Well, it's not like he can talk to anyone else, anyways—not now, when he's stuck in a clay room with no reason to venture further, or at least, not a reason in a human's eyes. In past lives, yes, he was able to talk to other people. Thinking back to his previous partners, they loved him, but they didn't *love* him. Admired, broken, and even crumbled, yes, but not loved, and maybe it was for their own good. Whether or not George is part of that demographic remains a mystery to him.

Each life always breezes past him in a hurry, maybe because he's technically immortal, but this one feels like ages despite it only being a month or so. He takes a look at the clock—it's gotten pretty late. In fact, It's one in the morning.

I've really been thinking for this long?

As if he were sighing, he sits up and numbly runs his hands over his smiley face. He can't possibly live like this—at least, not again. There are no fingerprints for him to leave behind, no specific smell to recall, no deep eyes to stare into. An unending cycle of time, drenched in memories that he isn't even sure are his; just different versions of him, supposedly.

And it leaves him with just shapes: a human, but just barely.

Dream shuts off his body for the night, and greets the morning with tireless songbirds and the stream of sunlight stabbing through the window. An abrupt click at the door flows into the

domesticity and he turns to see George enter the studio.

"Morning," he says, to which Dream only nods in return.

And, like a fool, a hollow man sits in the middle of the room contemplating his own existence in a fit of simmering desire—that is, *if* you can call him a man—with the goal of finding out an answer before he even has a question.

Chapter 5

George is dusting off a mug while the light filters through, gracing him in a soft brightness, and even a fool with no eyes could tell Dream was mesmerized by the view.

"Errmm... Grab me a jar of white glaze?" George asks.

Interrupted by his zoning out, Dream hums a hint of understanding and walks to the closet, picking out a very soft pale. Without thinking, he unscrews the paint open and dips a finger in. The color gave off a creamy feel to it as it reflected light; its consistency is similar to that of actual doughnut glaze, but more opaque, and had Dream been human, he would've been tempted to lick it off.

What colors would I be, if I were?

However, he decides to stop dawdling and turns back to George, who is holding a couple of paintbrushes and overlooking a line of several dry little projects at the middle table. Dream can see his eyebrows scrunched in concentration as he swipes a tender thumb over a plain plate—a respect to his craft. A weak thump sounds as Dream places the jar down, alerting George to his presence.

"Thanks."

They've gotten very casual now, though neither of them know why. Actually, yes they do, but they'd rather not touch upon it, like the losers they are. A familiar tinge of domesticity hits Dream in his expressionless face. It's something he misses. A lot. It's not that this brand of intimacy is foreign to him; it's nostalgic, and the thought of feeling it again might just destroy him because he'll have to let it go again. Eventually.

So, he speaks up, "What was I supposed to be, George? Like actually?"

George, in turn, looks up from his painting in surprise, because let's be honest, it is a pretty deep question.

"A warrior," he responds, "Greek imitation of some sort."

"Interesting.." Dream trails away.

"Interesting?"

"What'd you name me 'Dream' for, then? Am I dreamy?"

"No," George huffs in amusement, "You're so annoying. Didn't you say your name was 'Clay' or something?"

Dream hums in thought, "No, on second thought, I don't like that name anymore."

"Is that so?" There is an edge of tease to George's voice.

"That is so."

"Alright. I'll keep calling you 'Dream.' I'm surprised you like it so much."

"It has a nice ring to it—I'll say that much. But you didn't answer me: what's the name for?"

George hums reluctantly, regretting his earlier statement as a white lie, "... I suppose you weren't a

warrior... but someone who wished to be a warrior? That's what I meant by 'Dream.'"

Dream is subsequently surprised by this—for some reason, it wasn't something he expected, but he makes an interested noise anyway. George doesn't say anything else, though, and continues carving delicate patterns into his various creations. Meanwhile, Dream watches from a decent distance. The sword on the side sits glossy, reflecting a gleam of strength, almost enough to blind someone. Not even a spec of dry dust dares to encroach on its power, for its mere sheen could obliterate them immediately. Dream, once in a while, wonders what would've happened if he really did hurt someone with that sword. Some nights bother him with it—it scares him to an endless death.

But a rather uplifting statement distracts him from delving into that any further.

"You know..." George says with a begrudgingly fond smile, "I think I'm glad I got to keep you around."

To this, Dream struggles a bit to conjure up a response; unusual from his casual personality.

"You're lying," he musters out jokingly, but also not at the same time.

"Why would I be, you idiot?" George laughs, "Anyways, I think Sapnap needs some help with stuff. Why don't you go see him?"

Seeing as he has nothing else to do, Dream decides to comply, leaving George behind in the clay room to continue working.

And so, here we are again—a lost man walks to a painting studio regretting his last words—that is, if you can call him a man. Perhaps it's that he was so taken aback that he just didn't accept the sentiment, but regardless, what happens happens. And thank goodness George saw right through him enough to send him away to think, or at least, that is what Dream interprets as mercy. In truth, George probably doesn't think anything of it; it is just their daily bicker and banter.

But Dream continues to argue with himself.

That was a genuine statement... wasn't it? Shit. It was.

Then again, George's sudden fondness might have been a jab at his ego just to throw him on an emotional trip, and it's damn mean if that were the case, but Dream would accept it anyway, because he's an absolute simp, but he won't admit it. Besides, it's probably karma for all the times he's done the same.

"Are you gonna come in or something?" Sapnap calls over.

Oh, that's right. He's been standing by the door thinking to himself for the past minute or so, which is probably unnerving for someone in Sapnap's position. Realizing this, he awkwardly pushes past and closes it behind him.

"Oops."

"You're not a vampire, you know. You don't need me to invite you," Sapnap chuckles, "This is our house."

"Communist."

"Maybe. Maybe not. I see you have some clothing this time."

"Yeah."

Sapnap smiles connivingly, "Bet George couldn't resist, huh."

"Oh, definitely."

"Ahaaa!! What a simp."

"Siiiimp."

Sapnap turns back to his project, which is currently a hurricane of reds and blues, but they fit nicely enough. It seems Sapnap is mostly a gouache-user—a solid medium—trying out something unfamiliar, because around the room lie various canvases, all with a distinctive, sharp style, which is especially hard to do in oil paint. As a result, Sapnap is littered in a plethora of different colors more than he is used to.

Mouth muffled with a brush, he says, "Hey, could you get me some linseed oil? It's in the back."

Dream looks behind him to see a couple of bottles with several hues on a counter. He picks one up to observe—none of them are labelled.

"Which one is it?" He calls over.

To which Sapnap replies, "The one that kinda looks like piss."

Of course he'd say that, but even better, Dream laughs at it, because they both have the humor of a twelve-year old. After handing over the liquid, Sapnap pours a tiny drop onto his messy plate of paint.

"Gotta hand it to George, he does make good details on those hands of yours," he comments, taking a quick glance over.

And he is right. Dream's knuckles are pristine and sharp, yet soft at the same time, and his nails have their organic curve with their nice cuticles. Not only that, but the lines and prints of his skin shape out the small webs and folds between his fingers. His palm, especially, has a very holdable figure to it.

"He did spend a lot of time on them," Dream acknowledges.

Only to which Sapnap responds with the prominent, neutral lift of his eyebrows. What he's implying is very up to interpretation, but Dream knows exactly what it is.

"What?" Dream inquires rather sharply.

"Nothing, nothing. It just doesn't surprise me."

"I guess it wouldn't."

"Still needs to make your face, though. Wonder what it'll look like."

Now that he brings it up, George does have yet to sculpt him a face, though now it would probably be very awkward.

So, Dream says, "I did try to make one myself."

To this, Sapnap bursts out in a small chuckle, "Your smiley?"

"No, like a real face, but it wasn't that good."

"Figures, I think the smiley suits you better."

Dream knows that's true, but can't help lightly punching Sapnap in the shoulder for it. Even then, Sapnap just laughs a little bit harder.

"Ok, ok. I'm done," he finally finishes, "But I don't think George could take it if you had a real face—I think it'd break him. He's all over you, man."

Dream can only laugh at this, because he knows that like the arrogant flirt he is.

"Really, though," Sapnap continues, "What are you?"

A brief pause holds the conversation's breath, and Dream acts like he's thinking, but in reality, his heart is in a panic.

"I'm clay, what do you mean 'What are you?'" He jests.

But Sapnap scoffs with a smile, "You know what I meant."

In all seriousness, he should probably answer the question, and like a fool, he doesn't know how to, because he's stuck in his own vulnerability. They play a messy romantic game of cat and mouse, George and him. Not only that, but their arena is quite the strange one. There is only a bit of time before one of them gets tired of running. And of course, Sapnap manages to catch his hesitation.

"This silence is astronomical, Dream."

"Oh my god, you shut up."

It seems they've gotten to a casual point of their friendship since they had met, though Sapnap is more lighthearted handling a situation like this, strangely—almost as if their attitudes toward each other have switched.

"George is not the only simp here," Sapnap laughs, "And it's certainly not me."

"I am not a simp."

"Mhmm," he hums, unconvinced, "Sure."

"What's your deal?"

"You guys have been tiptoeing around each other for the past while, however much time that is. You, of all people, know that."

If Dream had a heart, he would feel it drop. Still, even without one, there is a tense pool of stillness that settles between them.

"I don't know," Dream says finally, "I'm just his creation."

"We know that isn't the case."

"I mean, I'm not used to whatever this is... What am I meant to do?"

"True. George had the same question."

"George went to you for relationship advice?"

"So, you're calling this a relationship, now?"

Dream immediately snaps to silence, then trips over his words, "Listen, ok, I'm used to people admiring me, getting mad at me for not being perfect, whatever, but not loving me. I don't know what to do with that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this isn't the first time I've 'woken up'."

Sapnap only shrugs, "It explains a few things, but who is George to you, then?"

"...I do like to flirt with him a lot, just to annoy him. And then.. Uh.. and then... uhm. Uh," Dream loses his words, "I guess I like him more than I thought I would."

"Really," Sapnap teases sarcastically.

"Yeah, but the thing is, what do I do with that? With this?" He vaguely gestures to his body.

"I mean I guess you don't do anything with it. But if you think a clay body will stop you, or most of all George, you are a coward."

Wow. That was bold, even for Sapnap.

"I don't want to hurt him, man," Dream argues, "I can't do this again. I can't have people...."

"Can't have people... what?"

"That's it. I can't have them," he watches Sapnap's face fall, and looks away for a pause, "I'm not human enough for them."

"You're human enough for George. And me."

"I'll just waste away again and the process is gonna start all over. And I would be fine with it, but... George.."

Sapnap stays silent at this, because Dream is right—as human as he may seem, he is a clay body: a mix of human personalities molded into one, though to be fair, that is also what a human is. Dream hasn't had it this bad before, and sure, he can be replaced with a new body and a new life, but George can't.

These feelings can't either.

Sapnap, however, digresses, "Well, if you want to be human that much, I'd get a face, first."

And not bothering to continue further, Dream ends it with an unsatisfactory "probably."

Chapter 6

Dream, quite frankly, is a coward, but he is smart. He's bold with all his joking and pestering and teasing that you never know what he holds close to him—emotions bound together in messy mesh despite his rather suave disposition.

But today is not a particularly smart day for him.

He and George are in the clay room once again, as they always are. For a quick second, George disappears into the kiln room to fire up some projects, leaving Dream lonelier than he thinks he'll ever be.

A face? Really?

Surely Sapnap knows it won't solve all his problems, but Dream can't blame him for thinking so. It is a nice suggestion; he'll tell him that. He hasn't had a face for a long time.

On the other hand, he's afraid of asking too much.. Not just from George, but from fate—in his dormant years he's seen so many things, but he's a coward to ever ask for the real thing: humanity. He's been so many things, too—forms big and small, but in the end, he is only cold earth. Sure, Dream is quite the audacious one, but there is only so long until it backfires on him, and he's facing the consequences of his own yearning.

"—ream?"

The voice shocks him back into reality, a little refreshing, and a little nostalgic. Or at least, he hopes it doesn't become nostalgic.

"Are.. you okay?" George's voice rings again.

Dream struggles to reply, and his so-called throat stutters a bit, until his brain turns on again

"Oh, yeah. 'M fine. Just statue things," he manages to chuckle out.

They both know it is not a statue thing, or maybe it is, but Dream's never done it before—George has picked up that much. Thankfully, though, he doesn't press on. Instead, an absentminded clay hand hovers over George's cheek, making him jerk up a little from surprise.

"...yes?" He tilts his head.

"Can you... make me a face?" Dream asks, strangely gentle and strangely open.

Now it is George who loses his words, taken aback from the request, "Oh. I guess I forgot. Uhh... Yeah, sure."

George does not usually do things for other people, but when it comes to Dream, it is a game of Russian Roulette, which often somehow just becomes a reluctant win for Dream. The reason why, however, is something they never touch upon, though Dream is mostly smug about it.

But Dream hides in the fact that George was going to carve out a face, anyway. They both do.

A clatter sounds as George lays out a keyboard of tools on the counter, as well as a sketch of his face. How long he's had it for—Dream doesn't know. Gliding his hands over the variety of solid shapes, George grabs a needle and turns to Dream, who is sitting on the table swinging his feet like

a toddler.

"Dream, oh my God you're gonna kick me."

"Good."

"You want your face done or not?"

"Hehe, okay I'll stop," Dream says, unusually compliant.

An amused sigh manages to escape George, much to his chagrin. He holds a tender hand to Dream's cheek, rubbing off the smiley, and gently lines in the proper proportions in its place. However, he finds that his arms get tired after what is only a few minutes of mapping out his countenance, and he also finds that he is on his toes.

"How'd you even make me so tall?" Dream chuckles at this, "Well, I guess it's a plus for me."

George fruitlessly retorts, "I'm not even that short."

"I didn't even say you were! But now that I think about it, yes, you are."

"Ugh, whatever. Can you sit on the floor for me?"

"What? No, that's so... awful," Dream complains, then jerks up for whatever reason, "Wait, actually... I have a genius idea."

He then suspiciously begins to drag a wire tool and holds it up to the back of his neck, wrapping it around the clay flesh in a loop.

"Wh.. what are you—?"

And in a swift movement, he pulls the strings of metal to a close and his head is sliced off the rest of his body without a sound, or at least skin-crawlingly creepy enough for George's eyes to widen in horror. Thankfully, though, he is worried enough about his head to catch it before it falls. Feeling his breath stop in shock, he can only freeze in his tracks.

"What's wrong with you?! Are you insane?? You could've told me before you did that, you idiot!"

Dream, for lack of a proper answer, merely wheezes uncontrollably and his body contorts just so, though George can't tell which source of clay his voice is coming from.

"Look," he struggles to say between breaths, "I'm Yankee with no brim."

In turn, George stares at the body of clay incredulously, then looks down at the head in his hands.

"I... I can't believe you," he says as he sets the head down on the table—at least working on Dream's face is a tad easier with it even though he'll have to mesh it back on later, "I always tell you not to hurt yourself, but here we are."

"Yeah, but they work because I'm a genius. "

"... I suppose so."

"That's what I thought. We're fine! Relax!"

George continues to shape the face into its proportions with a loop tool, chunking out the space for

the eyes first, as Dream sits on the table. The clay on his countenance is surprisingly soft, considering it's only been sitting on there for quite a while. He doesn't complain though—it's easier to work with. Using his thumbs, he firmly drags the clay to round over Dream's cheeks after running them over the brow bones. His fingers betraying him, he blankly rubs a spot at the edge of his face little too fondly than either of them are used to. Dream's body, in turn, shivers at this.

George happens to notice this at the corner of his eye, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

Hoping Dream is right, George continues cupping the head with hands, smoothing the skin around his nose. Taking a scalpel, he brushes gently from the forehead down onto the crevices in his eyes, and pushes the soft Greek nose into shape. He goes back to rework the eyes, which aren't really eyes at all yet. With multiple quick glances at the sketch, he etches in the depths and folds of the lids and concaves the irises. Then, he turns the tool around so that the blunt end points.

"This might feel weird," he smiles, not really knowing.

"You sound like a doctor," Dream teases.

"Yeah. I have a PhD."

"Wait, really? You're lying."

"I am lying, idiot."

"How am I an idiot? I got it right!"

At Dream's left eye, the rod is poked into the center to hollow out the pupil, and Dream, somehow, manages to blink.

"This feels... different," he says, turning his vision slightly, "Wow, I can move it."

"You haven't been able to do that?"

"No, I gotta turn my whole head."

"You're so bad. You're a loser," George jokingly bickers, sculpting in the other pupil.

"Wh—" Dream's body does a double take, "What do you want me to do? Turn human?"

"I mean. Maybe," George concludes, and they both fall silent after that.

Behind him, George takes a tiny ball of clay and scoops out an even tinier bit—two of them, actually. With tweezers, one of the bits is molded at the corner of the pupil, creating the illusion of a highlight. After the other highlight is done, Dream blinks multiple times, adjusting to the range of function.

And for a quiet moment, he looks up at George—something that he is not used to. His hands are covered in clay, gray and pink and pale to varying degrees. Dream may probably never say it, but he appreciates the effort.

He feels George's fingers run down his face again, but this time, to his surprise, to gouge in his nostrils, and his body jerks.

"George! Warn me when you do that!"

"Well, that's the last time I'll do that, so what's the point?"

"What!? That doesn't even make any sense."

George lets out a smiley huff, "Whatever. Pay back for cutting your head off, I guess."

It doesn't make any sense at all, or at least, not if you count the brief annoyance it causes Dream.

And lastly, George's hand stops at the lips, a thumb at their round center. A stare lingers at them before he drops his gaze to a tool. However, deeming no other utensil fit, he decides to use his own hands, because he, himself, is the tool, and the implication that it might mean that he's stupid is something he has begrudgingly accepted.

But ignoring that thought, he begins to soften the edges of the lips and press in their corners into a light smile, lining in fine details and cracks into its skin. Of course, this is where he realizes his face is dangerously close, and it is him who returns the lingering stare. Fortunately for him, Dream does not notice this, because he assumes it's just the process like a repressed, oblivious idiot.

"Alright," George concludes, "Let's try putting your head back on."

And Dream complies, because he really really wants his head back on for reasons yet to be known. Sitting down on a lower stool, he slouches, and George scores parallels into each surface before spreading a portion of slip. You know, like butter. They stay like this for a touching moment as Dream gains feeling back into his neck.

Dream, in turn, scrunches his face, and jokes, "Ew. What is this? Is this what you live like?"

"You literally just wowed at blinking five minutes ago."

"Well, now I can roll my eyes at you," Dream giggles, rolling his eyes.

He stands up to smooth and inch out the quirks of his flesh as you do with a sore joint. It.. feels just fine, though he doesn't know if he should be surprised by that or not. George reaches up to him to blend in his head to his neck, pacing around in observation as Dream turns to him.

"Finally—I've missed looking down at you."

"Maybe I should've just let your head fall."

Dream can only chuckle, but this time, it is with a face. His cheeks are squished high with a smile that he'll have to habituate himself with, and with eyes that don't reflect what they're supposed to.

Except... George may have forgotten to add something.

"Hold on.. A sec. Stay still," he tilts his head, and Dream does the same in return, except in confusion.

With both hands, George reaches up and presses soft intonations into the sides of his cheeks—

Dimples.

His heart betrays him, though—or actually, both of them— as he lets his eyes stay on Dream's face for a deafening amount of time, and before he can retract his hand back, a clay one stops it.

No, not stop exactly, but more of a gentle rest, as if it were saying not to let go just quite yet. With the other clay hand, Dream delicately holds George's chin up, and for a moment that was hot and

cold and blurry and clear and black and white all at the same time, he cannot resist. Neither of them can.

And like fools, they connect with a soft kiss.

George expects it to taste like clay, which is, quite frankly, gross, but instead he is met with the fact that Dream has lost this texture. In pleasant surprise, he pulls away and sees that the same lips are pink now, with tan skin surrounding it, and maybe a bit of stubble. It's incredibly sexy, except now is the time George can admit it out loud.

"Wh... you're human," he stutters, not knowing what to do with that fact.

A silence before Dream speaks, "You're... warm."

And also not knowing what to do with either of those facts, he takes a step back to look at himself. His hoodie is green with his former smiley, and on his legs cling black, washed-out jeans. What a loser. His eyes are a deep green as well—though George can't see the colors of either—and they wear a deep sense of profundity. This time, though, he knows why.

He looks back at George, a hand brushed endearingly to his cheek, now with skin and veins and blood and dozens of scars from the times George has fixed them.

Two men stand in a room—that is, if you can call either of them men in place of cowards— with an astonishing silence, but a strange beat of knowing that they have both gotten tired of running in their game of romantic cat and mouse.

"I think this means you can call me Clay now," Dream laughs with a smirk.

And George returns it with an edge of annoyance.

Epilogue

"So, like, what are we?" Clay says.

A pause before George thinks, "Uh. Whatever you wanna call it, I guess."

"Aighty, then. You'll be my simp."

George makes a face, "What? No. Whatever you wanna call it except that."

Clay hums, wrapping his now fleshy arms around George, who in turn tenses because he's a simp.

"You'll be my space heater."

"Do you even know what that is?"

"Of course, I do. I'm not stupid."

"I'd question that last statement."

"Maybe I am stupid, then," Clay admits boldly, only to say, "Because I love you."

Even after everything, George doesn't know how to respond to this at all, and Clay catches his silence to laugh.

"Shut up," George says, "You're so annoying."

Clay laughs even more, "You're so bad at this."

George scoffs, "Whatever. C'mon, let's go to sleep."

"Whaat? Leaving already?" Clay jokes, then cools down, "Alright. I think you need it anyways."

"What do you mean 'leaving'? You're staying here?"

"Yeah, why?"

"You're sure? Clay, you can't sleep on a table."

Clay, however, takes a moment to appreciate the usage of his name before confidently brushing it off, "I'll be fiine."

George hesitates at the implication of that, but he supposes that it'll tease Clay to let him stay in the studio because he'll either:

a) complain about the soreness the next morning

Or

b) wake him up in the middle of the night to complain about the soreness

Either possibility, George still gets to say he told him so, and that is a massive plus, but before he opens the door he feels a pang of comical guilt anyway.

"Okayyy."

"So, uhm. We might have to update our residential forms," George says, standing by the door of Sapnap's room.

"What? Why?" Sapnap turns his head from his phone, "You kickin' me out?"

"What? No, it's Dream. Er.. I guess we'll call him 'Clay,' now," George continues, fruitlessly hoping he'll understand, "Uhhh. Shit, how do I even explain this... we have another human in the house?"

"Inch resting," Sapnap pays no mind, other than probably needing therapy, "Why do I even live with you?"

"Weren't you my wingman?"

"Yeah, but I thought we honestly did eat edibles or something," Sapnap jokes, "I haven't looked at our IRS forms in a hot minute. Let me get em out."

He drags himself out of his chair and opens a safe in the bare corner of his closet. On a closer look, he pulls out a yellow folder, and in it are rather thick papers compiled in multiple clips. George notices his concentrated face scrunch, although this time it is out of confusion.

"There's... an extra stack here."

Clay Dream DOB: 08/12/1999

Filing Status: Single

Income for 2020: XX,000

Social Security No. XXX-XX-XXXX

"Huh..." George tilts his head, "That's weird. But it works."

"Quite epic."

"Why're you talking like that?" George mocks, "'Quite epic'."

"I literally cannot believe you. You say that."

"Yeah and it's my talking style. It's quite epic indeed."

Sapnap scoffs, "You're so annoying. Why does Clay even like you?"

"Shut up. I don't know that either."

"I figured. It was a rhetorical question."

George only gives him an annoyed, yet endearing shove. With the case closing almost as quickly as it started, he makes his way back to his own room.

Clay lies uncomfortably on the studio's table, writhing and trying to find a better position to "sleep" in, whatever that is. And also, it's fucking cold he's realized, even with the kiln room just a little bit away.

An eye twitches—he doesn't know which. Are they even supposed to do that? He lets out a sigh, and it feels natural coming out of him, but he still does a double take right afterwards. For the first time, the clay dust actually bothers him, yet the more he tries to brush it off, the more it attaches himself to him.

And with an annoyed huff, he gets off the table, only to realize his feet are sore, too.

Was being human always this awful?

He creaks through the rest of the house and manages, albeit still getting used to the tingling of nerves literally everywhere. Everything just feels a little too much—too mushy, too smooth, too rough, too cold, too hot, and even too nothing. Gingerly making each step up the stairs, he gravitates towards George's room, staring at the metal handle in hesitation because at the back of his mind, he knows it'll be cold to the touch.

But grimacing, because he knows he won't get anywhere if he just stands there, he grabs it and hisses at the feeling, and inside sleeps a cozy body across the room. Well, it wasn't necessarily sleeping, per se, but scrolling through a phone at this ungodly hour. Clay, however, is not surprised by this.

"I was waiting for you," George says with an annoying confidence.

"Shut up."

And now it is George's turn to laugh, though he does this a little too early, "No! Don't come here, you're covered in dust!"

"We can clean it up in the morning. Relax."

"You mean I'm gonna clean it up in the morning."

"I'll clean it up. I promise."

George huffs in disbelief, but still raises his arms up as an invitation because he's a simp. Underestimating what's about to happen next, he feels the weight of a solid body press him further onto his bed that nearly crushes his lungs, but for now, he supposes he's okay with that.

What he's not okay with is the scorching ice at his skin—Clay's hands on his sides, to be exact.

"Why are you so cold?!"

"Why are you so warm?"

Tensing at the rather ticklish sensation, he makes an attempt to sit up, but Clay holds him like a giant koala and his futile refuge—whatever he was going to do— is taken down.

"Noooo don't leave me," whines Clay.

And like a fool, George does not move an inch to fight back.

"Wow, you really live like this," Clay continues, showing his mottled hands to the both of them, "I'm gonna miss the times that you fixed these."

"I can still fix them, you know," George suggests, "They'll just be bleeding."

"Yeah, what is with that?"

"You expect me to know?"

"Well... at least it tells me you're warm."

"I suppose so."

They stay in an eased silence for a while, and George is so tempted to ruffle Clay's hair, and this time, he can actually do it. Unable to resist the inclination, he brings his hand up to wind softly through it, and though neither of them is sure if this is a conscious decision, they let it happen anyway. In turn, Clay loosens his posture—somewhat like a cat headbutting its head— to chase the feeling.

"... George?"

"Yeah?"

"There's, like, some weird feeling in my ribs."

"What?"

"Like... hm.. It feels like.. I dunno. Tingly, I guess. It happens when I think about you."

"I didn't know you had a brain to think, but it probably means you're simping for me," George says — a smug smile.

But Clay doesn't say a word in protest, instead humming with a hint of confirmation.

And after some consideration, George decides that maybe he's okay with his cold hands forever.

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